

BOOK REVIEWS

Junction City: New and Selected Poems, 1990-2015

by Eamonn Wall

Salmon Poetry, 2015

140 pages

\$12.75 (paper)

Reviewed by Lawrence Welsh

It's hard to say who or what completely owns the poet Eamonn Wall.

On one hand, the reader knows that Ireland is in his blood and bones, and the sense of longing for his native land is acute, original, and full of resonance. In essence, he's not only a great reporter, but one who has kept his eyes and ears glued to the land for decades and, in turn, has internalized the images and words into an individualistic but universal vision.

On the other hand, however, there's the American, the one whose words and images stay open to the vast confusion and splendor that make up the United States. Without question, Wall's three-plus decades in America—both on the East Coast and in the heartland—have cross-pollinated his work and created a voice like no other in world literature. This constant push and pull of the old and new is what's at the heart of his recently published *Junction City: New and Selected Poems, 1990-2015*. On many levels, this retrospective is a remarkable achievement by a writer who has given his life to a poetic craft that spans not only America and Ireland but digs deep into life's possibilities.

In "For the Gathering," the opening poem of the introductory 2015 "Gathering Suite," Wall stakes his claim as an immigrant, one who knows he must leave home for a new life:

*We are members of the proud diaspora rolling out-of-town. My father's
Face fully lighted-up and laughing I would never see again. The driver
Takes his seat. Roll on my river, roll. Roll on river, lead me home.*

One discovers, soon enough though, that both America and Ireland are home, so much so that one of his teachers calls out to him long

after his journey of immigration begins. In “My Teacher Calls Out to Me Across the Decades,” the poet realizes that two different cities in two countries carry the same name:

He reclaimed

*for history ordinary lives—our fathers
at threshing, our mothers at
Looms—*

*the world as I'd know he turned upside
down. Exit New Harmony is but two miles*

*Dear Fergus D'Arcy, we are almost home.
New Harmony, Indiana. My teacher smiles.*

But the smiles are often tempered, too, as the poet is thrust into the unknown and takes his place as just another voyager to the wilds of America. In the poem “Immigrants,” Wall is caught once again in the netherworld of getting tossed into the unknown, of never fully being here or there and stuck in between with many questions to sort out. The poem, in its entirety here, offers a first-rate examination of trying to discover what remains a mystery: that longing for a place that one can never fully return to now that the road has spread out so far away from its original starting point:

*Family pictures crowd our walls,
we are haunted by the girls
we didn't kiss, by the jobs made for us
we didn't get. Lonelier than
the parts we left behind, the dull life
of the old country would be fast enough.
Our national colours are the flags
which aren't flown on Labour Day.*

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*At night we go home to break our bread.
Our doors are bolted to America.
Our dreams fastened to no promised land.*

Still, America calls, like it did for so many before him. And it's a call that he wrestles and waltzes with, finally finding solace in the music as in the rhythms and melodies of some American song and beat. In this way, Wall beautifully calls up Rory Gallagher, the legendary blues guitarist and singer who roared out of County Cork to take his place on the world stage and contribute to this most significant American music form. In "Blues for Rory," both countries meld together much as Wall can't become himself without being steeped in both lands. It's a first-rate elegy to the memory of Gallagher, who was taken down too early by both the bottle and the road, that eternal highway that took him back and forth between Ireland, Europe, and America for decades of relentless touring:

*From the Slaney Co. Wexford Mississippi Delta
rode the rails in flannel shirts, warm CIE beer
in hands, in the smoking carriage by big muddy cities
Gorey/Chicago, Arklow/St. Louis, moving on mile
by mile marker by great rivers getting closer still
to hearing the legendary bluesman from Cork City
play on his battered strat the blues, and sing I could've
had religion...*

This, in effect, is the junction where the work coalesces, where one realizes that the two have completely become one, and the one is Wall's congruence of words. In the poem "Junction City," a child's memory of the Irish Sea soon turns into "Junction City, E. Flint Hills Blvd." And that becomes all of Kansas and turns back again into both countries where "the road you travel / and the road you dream merge" into the place where one tries to find his or her place and realizes, finally, that "My home is where I am, ..."

Toward the end of this magnificent collection, the reader realizes that the journey is complete and has ended in transformation,

where two worlds create more than just a new one, but a different consciousness that gives thanks to the years of staying open to all of life's possibilities. It's a surrendering, in a way, to the inevitable courage to become the journey that has transformed the man. In the poem, "Your Rivers Have Trained you," the reader realizes that the poet has returned full circle to take his place as a kind of new Irishman or, perhaps, the definitive Irish American:

*You've got to leave home.
You don't want to do it too soon.
Or leave it too long.*

*Your rivers have trained you.
Oceans prepared you.
Lakes have assumed you.*

In the end, I can think of no other poet who has embraced the new world and old so fully, one who has thrown his life wide open to the wind, one who can fully call both America and Ireland home.

Go to the Pine: Quoddy Journals, 2005-2010

by Mark Pawlak

Bootstrap Press, 2012

47 Pages

\$15.00

Reviewed by Christine Cutler

Mark Pawlak did not set out to become a poet. He graduated with a degree in physics from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and he has taught mathematics and science for more than 40 years. It was, however, during his senior year at MIT that he studied poetry and creative writing with Denise Levertov, and he has written poetry since that time. Currently a professor of mathematics and director of academic support services at the University of Massachusetts Boston, Pawlak has authored numerous poetry collections.

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It was through visits with Levertov and her husband at their Temple, Maine, home that Pawlak became familiar with the state. He and his wife, poet Mary Bonina, still spend time in Maine each summer. “Most summers we rent a house in Lubec for two weeks,” he said. “I do most of my writing each year during those two weeks in Maine.” *Go to the Pine* is a collection of “journal poems” Pawlak wrote during five summers (2005 – 2010) he spent in and around Lubec. The poems celebrate the people, the places, the trappings, and the quirks that make up the Pine Tree State.

Interestingly, the title alludes not only to the state symbol of Maine, but also to advice Matsuo Bashō, a 17th century Japanese poet who inspired Pawlak, gave to his students: “If you want to write about the pine, go to the pine.” A master of haiku, Bashō created a hybrid form of poetry—haibun—that alternated prose and haiku in tracing a journey. Included in haibun are two forms of imagery, internal (which reveals that which goes through the traveler’s mind during the journey) and external (which reveals that which the traveler observes during the journey). In addition to Bashō, *Go to the Pine* is a nod to the observational poetry of Charles Reznikoff and Lorine Niedecker.

In 28:VII:06, Pawlak reveals mundane regional quirks:

...violation of scallop rule, \$250

...hand fishing sea urchin without license, \$500

...negotiating worthless instrument, \$150

...violation of marine worm rule, \$250

...failing to kindle in prudent manner, \$100

—Machias District Court Cases, *Bangor Daily News*

Imagery carries the collection, and in his modern take on the haibun, Pawlak alternates the external and internal imagery through poetry and prose to observe, reflect, report.

Pawlak catches the sights and sounds of the coast in minute detail:

24:VII:06

Constellations of dew

on window screens.

*Spider, suspended
on invisible filaments just outside,
stages a tap dance
to foghorn accompaniment.
Cha-cha. Cha. Cha. Cha.*

13:VIII:05

*Cormorants
perched on rocks
their noses in the air
are not so disinterested
as they may seem,
Bream.*

*Sister cormorant
trolls nearby
periscope up
against the in-
coming tide*

Concise lines paint stunningly peaceful mental postcards of coastal life. Contrast the verse with prose in which Pawlak reflects on the external sights, sounds, and smells while alluding to the internal struggle to write “the” poem:

6:VIII:06

*With apologies to C.D. Wright
Every year the poem I most want to write, the poem that might in effect
allow me to stop writing, stands at the edge of a field shrouded in mist—
human apparition or tree misshapen by harsh elements. If I invite it to sit
beside me on the porch, it takes a tentative step, pulling fog’s hem with
it, then retreats. The field between us is grown up in thigh-high grasses,
wildflowers, thistles, pink beach roses with yellow centers. Closer, the mown
law is flecked with white clover florets and green blades wet with dew.
A foghorn blasts at regular intervals; clanking buoy keeps time. Lupines*

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have given way to Black-eyed Susans in the rocked edged garden. Smell of strong coffee mixes with pine scent and salt sea air, for it is always August, Maine, a simple pine box cottage with clean lines and wraparound porch, overlooking tidal marsh, sandbar, bay. No coaxing will entice the poem to inhabit its form, step across the distance, occupy the seat beside me. And if I should get up to approach this poem, hand extended, it backs away, shape-shifts, vanishes into the haze.

Anyone who has written—poetry or prose—can identify with the elusive pieces that sit just out of reach—words that call, words that haunt, words that tease. We reach for them and try to put them on paper, but they combat us because we, like Pawlak, must continue writing, continue showing life through our own eyes.

Go to the Pine is simple yet eloquent and reminds me of more than the salty sea air, the foghorns that sound off of the rocky coast, and the pine and white birch forests. Maine has always been, for me, a quiet place, a place to assuage tension, a place far away from the cookie-cutter big cities. It's a place I—and you—want to linger.

Without Leave

by Deborah Fleming

The Black Mountain Press, 2014

\$12.00 (paper)

Reviewed by Mary Lucille Hays

The themes Deborah Fleming tackles in her first novel, *Without Leave*, are important: responsibility, coming of age, communication versus isolation, trauma, war, and love. Furthermore, she takes them on against the backdrop of the turbulent '60s and '70s, reproducing the colors and music and incense and psychedelia of the times. She offers a balance between city and country; school, navy and hippie house; male and female.

As historical fiction set in the era of the Vietnam War, *Without Leave* nods to the works of Tim O'Brien and Marge Piercy. It too

wants to speak to the distrust young people felt in the government, their parents, and established cultural mores in the Vietnam War era. It follows two characters, David and Diane—both, coincidentally, from Ohio—whose meandering paths cross in San Francisco’s Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. As the title suggests, the novel’s protagonist has gone AWOL. David Shields was taught to be self-protective, to “shield” his thoughts and feelings. As a young teen, on a hunting trip with his brother, he discovered he didn’t like guns or killing, a too obvious foreshadowing of his future distaste for life in the U.S. Navy.

Fleming is also a poet, and the book is at its most poetic in describing the Ohio countryside of David’s boyhood:

During the autumn when David was ten he walked farther into the woods than he ever had before. At the bottom of a steep incline he crossed barbed wire dragged down by brambles and saw across a field an old barn with missing boards and holes in the slate roof. It must have been the place where the widowed farmer died in the house and wasn’t found for days, and afterwards no one wanted to buy the place because they said it was haunted. David walked through the tall grass to open the door of the barn. In the dark interior he could see pieces of a rusted disk and an old milking machine lying on the ground. Cobwebs hung from wooden beams. ... He heard the sound of a large bird flying from rafter to rafter high above his head, but in the dim light he couldn’t make out whether it was a red-tail or a kestrel.

This section does a good job of showing how David was already a loner, most comfortable exploring his world on his own, perhaps nostalgic for an older, even more agrarian life than the one he lives. It also hints at the dangers of such isolation, which will be important as he searches for connection and home throughout the book.

Halfway through the novel we begin to get Diane Cavanaugh’s perspective, to learn her history, meet her friends and lovers. We see her encounter sex, drugs, literature, and the theater; observe the “ideal relationship”; and grapple with ideas of race, education, and power. She begins to love a black man named Will. Another man rapes her,

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an experience that traumatizes her and leads her to change direction in her life. One paragraph after Diane resolves that she “will never be afraid of anything. *EVER AGAIN*,” Fleming tells us: “Some bird chirped a three-note song above the low rumble of a car on Greene Street. Through the window she saw steel fire escapes descend the opposite wall like a zig-zagging black sculpture above thin locust saplings that somehow survived in that canyon of concrete.” Her writing is at its most subtle and graceful in this simple moment.

While Fleming may be using a kaleidoscopic timeline to evoke the chaos of the era, the disjointedness of *Without Leave* sometimes merely serves to confuse the reader. The story is told from a third-person perspective with limited omniscience, which dips alternately into David’s and Diane’s consciousness. Their world is full of turbulence: the drug culture and its accompanying paranoia, antiwar demonstrations that dissolve into chaos, the senseless violence of the war and the stateside random killings in a violent society.

In the Navy, David assembles bombs and has witnessed firsthand the impersonal carnage of war. He blames himself for losing a pilot when the plane exploded as it was trying to land. He’s in the belly of it—the belly of the ship assembling bombs, the belly of a war he doesn’t believe in. However, many episodes in the novel do not move the plot forward or show connection or causality. For example, one lengthy section about Diane’s background reads like a biography, giving birthplaces and histories of her parents and grandparents in scholarly detail. Furthermore, three sets of three tiny typeset rose bouquets break up the text in many places, sometimes more than once on a page. These interrupters would be more appropriate in a romance novel.

This book was an ambitious undertaking, and might have benefited from a stronger editorial hand. These characters in their tempestuous world become so many scraps of stories blown about by a turbulent wind, rather than interwoven histories as in Marge Piercy’s *Braided Lives*. Like Tim O’Brien’s characters, David has to juggle the demands of his own humanity with those of an insulated military culture in the midst of an unjustifiable war, but these demands do little to shed light on the path David chooses at the end of the book.

Finding Abbey

The Search for Edward Abbey and His Hidden Desert Grave

by Sean Prentiss

University of New Mexico Press, 2015

230 pages

\$21.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Jackie Page

What may have begun for Sean Prentiss as fascination and hero worship for Edward Abbey—renowned American environmentalist and writer, who died in 1989 and was considered by some the Thoreau of the American West—ended with travel and discovery. “Bury me at once. Cover me with plenty of rocks so old Cousin Coyote cannot dig up my body,” Prentiss tells us Abbey repeatedly wrote in his journals. The lore of Edward Abbey and a compulsion to discover his secret burial place lure Prentiss out of a mundane existence as a single, middle-class, mortgaged, nine-to-five teacher in a city, with summers off, and into the writing of *Finding Abbey, The Search for Edward Abbey and His Hidden Desert Grave*, a biography/memoir hybrid.

Prentiss shines a light on the life and times of Abbey by interviewing his closest associates, women and men, including authors Jack Loeffler and David Peterson (who was also Abbey’s editor). These, and others whom Prentiss interviewed, held Abbey in high regard, though never denying his lusty proclivities towards women and booze, or his disregard for convention regarding the law. An evening spent with Ken Sleight and his wife, Jane, takes us into a round of well preserved memories of times as young eco-saboteurs. Ken Sleight was the inspiration for Abbey’s character “Seldom Seen” in his 1971 novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, a fictionalized account of the “monkey wrench” methods, including the destruction of machinery and trains, which Abbey and his cohorts embraced. Following its publication, Abbey was raised to the level of an underground cult hero. To some this represented a shift away from the pastoral nature of Thoreau’s writings, to an environmental preservation theme.

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Prentiss pursues and discovers the depths of the lore by living and exploring the Southwest at times with his best friend and fellow seeker, Haus, with a research assistant, Katie, and often alone. He brings us into the torn seat next to him in his old pickup and takes us down dusty roads. “If Abbey were sitting in the passenger seat,” he remarks “we could talk into the night about solitude and loneliness and the intersection of the two.” As a sunset turns into a full moon and a night sky, he says, “I am nowhere close to madness, but I’ve been wearing the skin of a misfit for the last few years and living the life of the solitary in a city of multitudes.”

Lonely months and years of Abbey research bedevil Prentiss into delving into his own overarching questions of what, and where, home is. He yearns for something of substance and authenticity in his life, something beyond solipsism. He seems to feel perpetually on the verge of living, yet without a sense of place. He tells us: “In the peacefulness of the breeze, my mind wanders from a dammed river, the Colorado River, to the Delaware River in eastern Pennsylvania. I grew up alongside the Delaware. I have river water in my veins. That river is one of those places that will forever feel of home.” Prentiss’ kin have lived along the Delaware River since 1740. When the government once threatened to dam it, activists reponded. Prentiss views the Delaware River activists as “...people with passion just like Ken and Jack and Ed...”

Over the latter third of his book, Sean Prentiss takes the last steps toward finding Abbey’s burial site with Haus. In preparation, he ventures often and alone, far into the desert, on foot, in the heat of the day, or the cold of the night. Though he imposes no judgment, Prentiss also engages his conflict with Abbey’s politics and social policies. As readers, we are voyeurs inside his mind, as he struggles even with the idea of what to do should he actually find Abbey’s burial site. He questions the wisdom of potentially harming Abbey’s friends and family and violating their rituals of mourning. He fears that revealing such a private place might prove harmful for the actual desert soil, when the curious, following in his footsteps, come to see for themselves.

It seems fitting that Sean Prentiss settled on a small lake in the Great Northeast with his wife, teaches writing, and is co-editor of *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre*. Perhaps there, in a remote region of a quiet space in the universe, albeit not in the American Southwest, he finds solitude that is in keeping with his well-defined sensibilities. Prentiss' quiver of heroes might lightly contain thinkers, writers and renegades such as the likes of Edward Abbey and the decent human beings he describes in *Finding Abbey*.

Note: *Finding Abbey* is the winner of the 2015 National Outdoor Book Award.

Easiest If I Had a Gun

by Michael Gerhard Martin

Alleyway Books

an imprint of

Braddock Avenue Books, 2014

135 pages

\$16.00 (paper)

Reviewed by Erica L. Punke

As a high school teacher, I'm well acquainted with many of the types in Michael Gerhard Martin's, *Easiest If I Had a Gun*. I've taught them—the artistically talented girl with the impossible home life, the boy who moons after the wrong love, the kid who can't blend in and fly under bullies' radar—many times over. Martin captures them all: their grime and the glimmer beneath it, their all-or-nothing adolescent psyche, their potential energy quashed before it can go kinetic. Although adult and child protagonists appear as well, the teenagers—suicidal, triumphant, and flawed—resonate the most with me. As we teachers do, Martin builds avenues down which his characters could drive toward success and dream fulfillment, but as teenagers do, these characters allow obstacles, both external and internal, to mire them in familiar failure.

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The collection begins with “Shit Weasel is Late for Class” which, from its first sentences about a beating against the Virgin Mary, previews the irreverent way Martin pushes his readers into unexpected territories. He does not cling to the archetypal optimism imbued in audiences by too many odds-overcoming underdogs, and he challenges this sacrosanct pattern in “Shit Weasel” and many of his other stories. Even when Martin’s characters come out closer to the top, the reader can’t quite cheer because their methods aren’t so heartwarming. Martin employs devices that make his plot twists believable. In describing the cycle of bullying on the second page, he subtly foreshadows the story’s unexpected ending. By slowly escalating Josh’s plans with the weapons he acquires, he makes their inclusion suspenseful but their ultimate fate understandable, not disappointing. Martin’s realistic unpredictability carries forth throughout the collection.

Other elements unite Martin’s stories, as well. The protagonists share a self-acknowledged loserdom. As Josh states outright: “... there is an undercurrent buzz, the message, like synchronous pulses from a thousand little transmitters, that I am a loser.” Whether they express that loserdom by lusting for a teacher and attempting suicide after being abandoned, braving a snowstorm and hypothermia to be rejected by a girl, or lying relentlessly to cover for an absentee father, Martin’s characters are coated in a film of failure that interferes with their dreams. Still, it is these loser-like qualities that lead the audience to identify with each of them. All of us know how it feels to lose.

Martin invests each character with grime enough to warrant their lack of self-esteem but also with true worth. Ten-year-old Amazing Popeil lies constantly and picks on the “slow” boy whose father takes him fishing when his own dad won’t go, but his bad behavior springs from his desperation for his father’s love and attention. Jack, talented at filmmaking and working with technical equipment, gets lackluster grades, drinks and smokes with his parents, and endangers himself and his relationships with those who truly love him, but all because of his unrequited love for Meghan. Emilie is an award-winning artist

on the road to art college, but her alcoholic mother and deflated self-image hold her back. Each character has a glimmer of potential beneath the loser-gloom, but few can slough off the negativity enough to achieve their dreams.

Their loves thwarted, their dreams quashed or postponed, Martin's characters do not remain defeated. Several contemplate suicide, one attempts it, but none ultimately give up on life. Although Martin's underdogs don't ride off into the sunset with their loves or make it big gambling on their dreams, they do still maintain a note of hope on their unpredictable but inevitable journeys. *Easiest If I Had a Gun* makes for an engrossing and uplifting read.

A Meal Like That

by Albert Garcia

Brick Road Poetry Press, 2015

96 pages

\$15.95 (paper)

Reviewed by Karissa Knox Sorrell

In his recent *New York Times* op-ed “Choose to be Grateful. It Will Make You Happier,” Arthur C. Brooks writes, “Truly happy people find ways to give thanks for the little, insignificant trifles.” The poems in Albert Garcia's *A Meal like That* do just that. They praise what might have been overlooked minutiae of a man's life—a dragonfly wing, mouse droppings, and the way a wife pushes her hair back from her face, to name a few. This book teaches us to be thankful for the small things.

The opening poem, “Mosquitofish,” bounces from insect larvae to banana cream pie to sourdough bread, but not without intent. Here, food is a form of salvation. “Wouldn't it be great/if we could all gorge ourselves/to protect each other?” the speaker asks. He later continues:

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*Would a meal like that
save my friend from the dark
pain of his marriage
ending—or salve my wife’s
migraines with cool relief?*

Food plays a starring role in many of these poems, from elephant heart plums in the hands of a boy to raspberries fed to a lover. In a society where the communal meal has all but disappeared, these poems help us remember how food can bring us together.

These are meals of growing up and becoming a man. As boy guts his dinner in “Boy Cleaning Trout,” he

*remembers the fish’s mouth
opening and opening, gills
lifting in what looked like exhaustion
but could have been pain.*

We are privy to a rite of passage: the boy is learning to hunt and fish, to provide, which is a cultural rite of passage. Yet we also witness the boy learning to be grateful. He knows that the fish’s death sustains him and his family, and he learns that the suffering of creatures is not to be taken for granted.

Later in the book, the narrative focuses almost solely on adult life and relationships. A notable poem is “November Task,” in which the speaker has been given the task of burying his wife’s sick cat alive. Coupled with the agony of the job is the anguish of the relationship:

*Quit crying.
You’re not carrying the shovel

to the field, digging a hole
in the muck of winter.*

Garcia blends the intensity of a short, end-stopped line with the power of an enjambed line in this poem, successfully conveying the speaker's spurt of anger undergirded by unending grief.

This volume is a testament to a life well loved. From the fourth-grader who learned to celebrate his friends' jump shots in cuss words to the father who made thirty-seven free throws to an audience of his infant daughter to the husband who loves to watch his wife brush her hair at night, Garcia has achieved Rilke's admonition "to praise." *A Meal Like That* shows us that life itself is the meal, and we are to give thanks.

Falling Landscape

by Silvia Curbelo

Anhinga Press, 2015

92 pages

\$18 (paper)

Reviewed by Scott Woodham

Silvia Curbelo's fourth collection, *Falling Landscape*, explores persona and self by interrogating the necessity of identity cues and "place" when readers and poets pursue the lyric project. Fuzzy details, indistinct landmarks and people, and lingering vague objects of desire that have disappeared, relocated, or never materialized help Curbelo explore major themes requiring distance or absence, such as desire, motion, silence and emptiness. This book exploits negative space and dream-time to pare the ever-shifting self down to vague essentials, and unfolds as a direct and interesting challenge to hyper-realist, place-centered, identity-bound lyric.

In most of the first three sections of this four-part collection, Curbelo keeps resolution just ahead, forever coming into focus. Plenty of passages or poems in the early parts have a pull toward narrative, but unadorned nouns and indeterminate pronouns complicate it by veiling notions of what's at stake or being experienced, and what

motives are at play. Some readers may find those feelings similar to feelings created in real life by an increasingly rapid, globalized world.

“The Law of Supply and Demand,” the first poem of section II, pulls readers toward narrative at the opening of an exploration of moral economy: “The pawn shops of the world are offering / their wares. Sunlight pours in.” But soon it veers toward unknowing, resists narrative motion with indeterminacy: “In a world of closed doors / something is unlatched and left // for broken. Whatever it takes, there’s a need and a cost.” As the denouement begins, the sky—a recurring character—becomes backdrop to an existential set of guesses. “The sky with its hundred false starts / where the nearly possible meets // the hopelessly undone, the one promise it keeps.” At the end, “Someone holds out the future / in his hands like a piece of bread. // *Open this*, he says.”

Suppressed narrative elements also tend to amplify unknowing as the book’s major theme, which tends to create doubt in the personae speaking, or at least uncertainty about clues to their identity. In “A Short History of Goodbye,” for example, “The grass tells nothing,” and “Only the wind knows what’s / at stake here.” And in “What Hope Is,” hope includes, “The way someone / whispers someone’s name / into a glass, then empties it, / swallowing that small word.”

Although Curbelo’s bio notes that she emigrated to the U.S. from Cuba with her family as a child, she does not deploy identity cues as some may expect. In daily life, we all run around creating and maintaining identities, but here we’re transported to dreamspace where none of the usual landmarks matter. The dislocation is obvious and clearly deliberate throughout, for example, when Curbelo repeatedly uses “bread,” rather than a kind of more specific food, or when she chooses “tree” instead of something more specific like “pine,” or even something that like “palm.” That technique helps relocate readers to a kind of everywhere-nowhere. That dislocation may be similar to the feeling many émigrés feel.

The strategy of indeterminate diction and narrative dislocation precludes many kinds of verbal stunts, but Curbelo uses anaphora often to create texture where options are limited. Repetitions become

central to the dreamscape as it becomes clearer and sometimes more familiar in the final two sections—particularly in the title poem, and in “Headache,” where visceral “I wanted ...” constructions describe “each brooding way the body answers, the soft and / crooked places where the bones meet and sing.”

The persona in *Falling Landscape*’s title poem, arranged second-to-last, poses three key questions amid anaphora of negation: “...And what did we find / there? What sound shattered the brick and mortar of that moment? And what of forgiveness, its plates / and bones?”

The answers may lie in an earlier poem, “The Last Time I Saw Alice,” a conceit based on a children’s pirate story in which the hero has swallowed the treasure map. Alice swims “till she’s the outline of a thought in your head, / the blank in this story / a promise standing in the weeds / the silver shovel in her hand.” Negative-space images like that are central to many of these poems, as are such promises and the devices or tools necessary to fulfill them.

Contemporary lyric is rife with invitations to the reader to step into another’s identity, and that time-traveling empathy is easier to do with specific details and sense data. That mode is so familiar today that it can be hard to imagine lyric poetry without a deterministic “poetry of place” or related items of personal identity. Here, readers are left with the impression that in the lyric, place and identity may really be the deep sand of mundane life that must be cleared away, rather than landmarks on a map to find the treasure of mutual self.